



Master of Public Administration Program

The Context of Public Administration

1st Year Core MPA, Fall 2026

Olympia Cohort

MPA Mission Statement: Our students, faculty and staff create learning communities to explore and implement socially just, democratic public service. We *think* critically and creatively; *communicate* effectively; *work* collaboratively; *embrace* diversity; we *value* fairness and equity; *advocate* powerfully on behalf of the public; and *imagine* new possibilities to accomplish positive change in our workplaces and in our communities.

"Be the change."

Class Meetings & Locations:

MPA New Student Orientation Session: September 19, 9:30 am to 4pm @Purce Hall 7

First Class: Thursday, October 1, 6pm to 8:50pm

Regular Class Schedule: Thursday Evenings, 6pm to 8:50pm (except November 26)

Additional Meeting (devoted to Fall Project presentations): Saturday, Dec 12, 9am to 3pm

Faculty:

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Course Description:

Course Description: The purpose of first year core is to identify and explore the fundamentals of governing and administering for the public good. In the fall quarter we examine several layers of context that surround the work of public and nonprofit administrators. We will increase our understanding of the political, social, cultural, and economic contexts of public and nonprofit administration.

Historical and theoretical awareness helps public administrators discern the environment they work within. This awareness requires advanced critical reasoning skills. Therefore, a key part of our work fall quarter will be to develop and advance our skills to think critically and reason effectively. The following learning objectives are meant to clarify what results we want our learning community to achieve by the end of the quarter.

Key questions for MPA students:

- What is public administration as a field of study?
- Who are public administrators and who is the public?
- Why does public administration matter? What are the enduring issues and why?

Learning Objectives:

Context 1: Explore theory and practice of public administration through various perspectives

Context 2: Become familiar with the field of public administration as an academic field.

Context 3: Identify tools, methods, and approaches used by public administrators.

Context 4: Develop skills of effective leadership and teamwork.

Context 5: Demonstrate graduate student level abilities of communication, critical thinking, and analysis

Credit Course Equivalencies:

2 - Theory of Public Administration

2 - Public Sector Economic Theory

2 - Public Sector Teamwork

Readings for Fall 2026 are available on Canvas.

A Brief Look Ahead

Winter quarter, we will examine the knowledge and skills needed to practice democratic public and nonprofit administration through leadership, management, and organizations. We will be looking at these issues through a systems-thinking lens. Part of our work each week during the winter quarter will involve working in teams and advancing and learning how to effectively collaborate for the common good.

Spring quarter, we will examine the intersection of budgets and policy and fiscal aspects of public and nonprofit service and public goods. Key to our work spring quarter will be to learn about the acquisition and use of public and nonprofit resources.

Assignments

1. **Weekly Writing**: Submit 6 out of 9 short-form written assignments (500-750 words). These vary in format each week from analytic memos, white papers, community statements, and academic analyses. Each will respond to the readings for the week and specific instructions for the format and required content are on Canvas in the week's module. Each memo will also be accompanied by a 1 page visual.
2. **9 Seminar "Tickets"**: Students will come to class each week with three quotations from the weekly readings and one discussion question. These are required to participate in seminar and to be counted as present for that part of class.
3. **Literature Review**: Submit a literature review approximately 2,500 words in length (not including abstract or references). The literature review should include a mix of both academic, practitioner(professional) sources and also relevant contemporary news stories. The literature review should have a primary and secondary theme chosen from the weekly topics from the class (e.g. Leadership and Economic Rationality).
 - Week 3: A proposal for the literature Review
 - Week 5: Draft of the literature Review
 - Week 8: Final literature review deliverable
4. **Team Work Exercises** (ITPmetrics.com). Students will participate in asynchronous team building curriculum through the ITPmetrics.com website. The team work exercises consist of professional designed and validated surveys, analysis, and activities that provide check-ins on team member perceptions and overall team strength. Time in class will be given for some of the surveys along with time for team projects.
 - Week 1: Individual Survey (personality) in-class
 - Week 4: Team Design Survey (topic and team selection);
Individual Survey (conflict resolution) in-class detail].
 - There are additional "check-ins" your team will do as your work progresses.
5. **Research Proposal**: Students will prepare a research proposal of approximately 1,250 words in length. The proposal should describe a gap that you identified in your literature review and describe why further research would be interesting and relevant. Students will also present on their proposal for one minute to the rest of the class. Research proposals will include:
 1. Description of what you would want to learn more in this topic
 2. Describe a gap or opportunity to build on existing research
 3. Give an example from news media about how your question/scenario would play out in real life.

4. Proposal should integrate more than one of the weekly themes from this class.

6. **Final Activity:** Students will participate in a Saturday session at the end of the quarter. After every class member has given their 1-minute research proposal presentation, students will caucus with each other to form teams with similar research interests. These teams will work together during Winter Quarter on their Organizational Analysis research project.

Draft Schedule (See Canvas for most recent schedule)

Week	Topic	Due:
Week 1 (10/1)	Intro	Weekly Writing 1:
Week 2 (10/8)	The Public in Public Admin	Weekly Writing 2:
Week 3 (10/15)	Econ and Administration (guest visit from writing center on lit reviews)	Weekly Writing 3: Lit Review Proposal
Week 4 (10/22)	Neo-liberalism	Weekly Writing 4
Week 5 (10/29)	Economic Rationality	Weekly Writing 5 Lit Review Draft
Week 6 (11/5)	Talking Beyond the Rational	Weekly Writing 6
Week 7 (11/12)	Collective Action	Weekly Writing 7
Week 8 (11/19)	Leadership	Weekly Writing 8 Lit Review Final Product
Week 9 (12/3)	Social Capital (Putnam and Ostrom)	Weekly Writing 9
Week 10 (12/10)		Research Proposal
Saturday (12/12)		Final Presentations on Research Proposal

Faculty Commitments and Responsibilities

Trauma-Informed Principles Commitment: While faculty and students experience traumatic events throughout their lives, the global pandemic and endemic racism have created ongoing, overarching traumatic events, heightened by each person's individual experiences. The result can be ["a cognitive burden comparable to a full-time job."](#) Faculty are committed to recognizing trauma and resisting re-traumatization by integrating [Trauma Informed Teaching & Learning Principles](#) throughout the course. Specifically, we seek to create an atmosphere that is respectful, transparent and trustworthy by making expectations clear and communicating with the goal of building learning community trust and understanding to foster student choice by, when possible, offering options for engagement, readings, and communication; and lastly, to empower student voice by responding to the various forms of privilege and oppression silencing and limiting decision-making in learning communities.

Mandatory Reporter: The Evergreen State College is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and harassment, including sexual assault, domestic/relationship violence, sexual harassment, stalking, and retaliation. We are committed to your well-being and safety, and we're open to discuss any concerns you may have.

Please know that we are Responsible Employees, meaning that we are legally obligated to share information with the College's Title IX Coordinator in certain situations that help ensure a student's safety and care is being addressed. Although we have to notify the Title IX Coordinator, it will be up to you to control how your case is handled, including whether to pursue a formal complaint or legal action or not. The goal is to make sure you are aware of a range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you are seeking confidential support, please feel free to contact the following confidential resources: Office of Sexual Violence Prevention and Response (Sem I, 4119, 360.867.5221, jonese@evergreen.edu), Student Wellness Services (Sem I 2110, 360.867.6200), or SafePlace Olympia (521 Legion Way SE, Olympia, 360.754.6300)

Reasonable Accommodations will be provided for any student who qualifies for them through a working relationship with Access Services. If any student has a health condition or disability that may require accommodations in order to effectively participate in this class, please request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact the office of [Access Services](#) for Students with Disabilities (867-6348 or 6364) to receive a letter of accommodation. If the student is already working with the office of Access Services the faculty should have received a letter clearly indicating the student has a disability that requires academic accommodations. Information about a disability or health condition will be regarded as confidential.

Student Commitments and Responsibilities

Participation & Attendance: Students are required to attend each class meeting in its entirety. Participation includes focusing on class content, contributing in class and seminar, listening to others, taking notes, completing class interactive exercises, avoiding distractions, and listening to and dialoging with the guest speakers. If an absence is unavoidable, faculty should be notified prior to a class and/or seminar absence.

After one absence per quarter (= 3 hours accumulated is one absence), make-up work may be assigned by faculty. Makeup work must be completed by the end of the last scheduled class meeting to receive course credit. After 12 hours of absences total in one quarter, you may be denied full credit for the course. Also, after reoccurring absences (e.g., being late to class; regularly missing an hour of class), you may be denied full credit. Finally, if you do miss a class, you are expected to do the reading for the missed class meeting, turn in any assignments that were due on the class date missed, and review class notes and materials available on Canvas.

Late Assignments: Turning in assignments late is unacceptable. If there is an unavoidable need to turn in an assignment late, the student should contact their faculty no later than the original assignment's due date to discuss options. Late assignments must be completed by the revised due date to ensure full receipt of course credit. Late assignments may or may not receive feedback.

Credit: Students will receive 6 graduate credits at the end of fall quarter if all course requirements have been satisfactorily completed. Students will be evaluated based upon their progress towards the learning objectives, assessed from classroom, seminar, and assignment performance. **No partial credit will be awarded.** Full loss of credit decisions will be made by the faculty team. Full loss of credit for two terms of core may result in dismissal from the MPA program. Failing to meet course requirements (e.g. not completing one or more assignments, completing one or more assignments late, or multiple absences) may constitute denial of total credit at the discretion of the faculty. Students at risk of losing credit will receive written notification prior to the end of the quarter.

Human Subjects Review (HSR): Students may NOT conduct primary data collection without HSR approval by faculty. There may also be requirements regarding research protocols with governments (Tribes/Feds/state/local), Native communities, private organizations or nonprofits. For more information see the [Institutional Review Board Student Guide](#).

Plagiarism: (i.e., using other peoples' work as your own) may result in total loss of credit for the class and may result in dismissal from the MPA program. See the [MPA Handbook](#), for the MPA Academic Honesty policy and additional information. Academic Honesty at TESC: "Plagiarism is defined as representing the works or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise. It includes, but is not limited to, copying materials directly, failure to cite

sources of arguments and data, and failure to explicitly acknowledge joint work or authorship of assignments.” Source: <http://www.evergreen.edu/advising/academichonesty.htm>

Evaluation: Student’s course self-eval and eval of seminar faculty are both required for credit as submitted via my.evergreen.edu .

Technology Use & Learning Styles: We all have different ways of learning. Faculty will actively work towards providing information in multiple formats: tactile, auditory, visual, experiential, etc. However, we are limited to means appropriate for the classroom environment. Surfing the internet, checking social media, reading e-mail, playing with cell phones are not appropriate use of class time. Consult your faculty to discuss technology use and learning style options.

Use of AI: Discuss how you plan to use AI with faculty as there are many types of AI with multiple ethical considerations. AI is also experimental and is often inaccurate. Before considering using AI for the course, discuss fair use with faculty. If using as part of an accommodation, students must get a letter of accommodation through access services. If you have discussed AI use with faculty, and have received permission or an accommodation, AI use in your assignments must be cited per APA guidance: <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/resources/publishing-tips/policy-generative-ai>. Additionally, before using AI on an assignment in any allowed manner, students must document an AI-use strategy before beginning the assignment and include strategy and full chat transcripts (when applicable) as an appendix to the assignment.

Guest policy: Guests are welcome to visit our learning community during class time and seminar meetings with approval from course faculty in advance of each requested visit. It is the host student’s responsibility to contact the faculty with details about the requested guest visit and await approval. Prospective students may visit one class meeting of first-year Core without advance faculty approval, but must notify faculty that they are present prior to the beginning of class. All guests must abide by all social contract, conduct code, and nondiscrimination policy guidelines as aforementioned in this handbook. Per faculty discretion, guests may be asked to leave and not permitted to return to class if these guidelines are violated in any way including behavior that disrupts the learning community. All guests are expected to minimize their participation in class and seminar discussions.

Inclement Weather: In the event of bad weather or emergencies students should check with for announcements of campus closures. Students can call the main campus line 360-867-6000 to get the latest news regarding a campus closure or delay. Faculty may decide to still hold class virtually or may cancel a class meeting even if campus is open and we will send an all-class email prior to the start of class. Students are responsible for checking email and ensuring viable online access options are available to them.

Communicating: Email and Canvas are our primary means of communication. Students are responsible for checking their Evergreen email and Canvas regularly.

Use of Student Work Posted to Canvas: Students post their work to an online learning platform known as "Canvas". Our class Canvas site is accessible to faculty and students registered for this course only. The work students post on Canvas is their private intellectual property and may not be used or distributed without their expressed consent. Some work may also be owned by governments, organizations, or communities. Their informed and voluntary consent would also need to be obtained for use and appropriate cultural protocols would also need to be followed.

Audio or Video Recording: No audio or video recording may occur during class without the informed and voluntary consent of the students and faculty involved.

Collective Commitments and Responsibilities

Tribal Acknowledgement for both Olympia and Tacoma locations of The Evergreen

State College: The Squaxin Island Tribe's habitation of the land on and around the inlets of the Southern Salish Sea, including what is now the City of Olympia and here at The Evergreen State College spans thousands of years. The ancestral families who lived and thrived here: They named Budd Inlet Steh-Chass, and they named Eld Inlet where the campus is located Squi'Aitle. Today, the Squaxin Island Tribe continues to live on and steward the lands and waters of the Southern Salish Sea. We acknowledge the Squaxin Island Tribe as it continues to live on and steward these lands and waters.

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional homelands of the Puyallup Tribe. The Puyallup people have lived on and stewarded these lands since the beginning of time, and continue to do so today. We recognize that this acknowledgement is one small step toward true allyship and we commit to uplifting the voices, experiences and histories of the Indigenous people of this land and beyond.

We respect and acknowledge the Squaxin Island and Puyallup Tribes, and other Tribes across the Americas, and their many contributions to The Evergreen State College (in support of education, Tribal sovereignty, environmental stewardship). This acknowledgement is one small step toward respect and collaboration with the aim of uplifting the voices, cultures and histories of the Tribes of these lands and waters.

Multiculturalism & Diversity: Faculty and students will actively work towards contextually weaving multiculturalism and diversity throughout our learning as related to readings, lectures, seminar, and group projects. In a learning community students and faculty share the responsibility for the teaching and learning environment. Multiculturalism and diversity is to be understood as aiming to promote constructive community discourse about issues of culture, power, and differences.

Conduct & Conflict Resolution: Please refer to the [MPA Student Handbook](#). Discuss any problems involving others in the learning community directly with the individuals involved (so long as the concerned party feels safe doing so). Possessing respect for others is fundamental

to an open, free, and educational dialogue. All students are expected to support and contribute to a well-functioning MPA classroom and learning community. Behavior that disrupts the learning community may be grounds for disciplinary action, including dismissal from the MPA program. All students will be held accountable for maintaining the highest of academic standards.

We will abide by the [social contract](#): WAC 174-121-010 College philosophy.

We will abide by the [student conduct code](#) (including academic integrity and plagiarism): Chapter 174-123 WAC, Student Conduct Code & Grievance/Appeals Process: <https://www.evergreen.edu/offices-services/academic-affairs/student-conduct-code>.

We will abide by the [non-discrimination policies and procedures at TESC](#)

Additional Campus Resources

- [Academic and Career Advising](#)
- [Academic honesty](#)
- [Access Services for Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Alcohol/drug use](#)
- [All Official College Policies; Assistive Technology \(AT\) Lab](#)
- [Basic Needs Resources](#)
- [BLISS \(BIPOC & LGBTQ+ Intersectional Support Services\)](#)
- [Code of student rights and responsibilities](#)
- [COVID-19](#)
- [Conflict Resolution ; Counseling Services](#)
- [Evergreen's Social Contract](#)
- [Free Speech Guide](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Media Loan](#)
- [MPA Student Resources](#)
- [Non-discrimination policy](#)
- [QuaSR: Quantitative & Symbolic Reasoning Center](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct reporting and resources](#)
- [Student Activities](#)
- [Student Employment](#)
- [Student Engagement, Equity, and Support](#)
- [Student Wellness Services](#)
- [The Writing Center](#)